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Per
DOS memo 25/47
By: ~~AW~~ IC; Date 6/11/97

THE WHITE HOUSE
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Per

DOS Policy 3-20-98
By: ~~AW~~ IC Date 6-2-98

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September 5, 1961

Copy for Ambassador Harriman

Read from Cill
Mr. George Bundy's
off

(Their meeting
no 380)

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MINUTES OF DISCUSSION ON SOUTHEAST ASIA, Aug. 29, 1961

Present: The President, Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara,
Mr. Allen Dulles, Ambassador Harriman, The Attorney
General, Mr. Alexis Johnson, John Steeves, Robert Johnson,
General Taylor, Mr. Bundy

The Secretary of State indicated that the primary present need was a more direct contact with Souvanna Phouma and that the recommendation of the Department was that Ambassador Harriman should undertake this task. The meeting between Falaize and Souvanna was not encouraging, especially in that Souvanna's proposal towards his government was weighted heavily towards the left. But Souvanna might modify his position if he knew:

- that we are reasonable;
- that we could fight if we had to; and
- that we would be prepared to give real support to a genuine neutral government under his leadership.

Ambassador Harriman strongly supports this view of the matter, and felt that only a direct American effort would be likely to move Souvanna. Ambassador Harriman also warned against the danger that Phoumi might try to prevent a political settlement. At the same time Ambassador Harriman would want to be sure that there is an alternative to negotiation before he begins talking.

The Secretary of State remarked that the French have weaknesses as negotiators in the circumstances because they will take any solution rather than engage in active resistance, and they have nothing to offer in the way of significant aid to a new government.

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It was agreed that Ambassador Harriman would be authorized to negotiate with Souvanna about the shape of the government, the role of the ICC, the reconstruction of the Army, the nature of the French military presence, and the possibility of U. S. support. These negotiations would be in Paris if possible -- otherwise at Pnom-Penh. We would move as quickly as possible, and if we cannot get Souvanna to play our game, perhaps we can get him to quit.

The President, in approving this pattern of negotiations, made clear that we would like nothing better than to get out of Laos, if we can." We have no objective there other than to reach an acceptable settlement which does not hand the country over to the Communists.

Discussion then turned to military planning. General Lemnitzer and Deputy Under Secretary Johnson outlined two plans as presented in the Task Force memorandum. One was an enlargement of SEATO 5, and the other a development of a series of lesser steps to be taken in the absence of an open renewal of hostilities. The Secretary of Defense, in commenting on these plans, made plain his own conviction that the crisis in Berlin was of overriding importance and might easily limit our ability to respond by active military means in Laos. We would not expect in any case, to fight a war on the Korean style in Laos, but the European crisis made it more urgent than ever to try to get peaceful settlement.

Nevertheless specific actions to strengthen the military position, as listed in National Security Action Memorandum No. 80 were quickly approved at the end of the meeting.

McGeorge Bundy
McGeorge Bundy

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